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by Troxey Kemper

Cynthia Ann Parker was stolen by Comanche raiders in 1836 from Parker Fort in east central Texas. The marauders took Cynthia, age nine, her younger brother, John, and three others. For a time Cynthia and John remained with the same raiding party, but the other captives were sent elsewhere.

The raiders returned to the camp of their chief, Peta Nokona. The Parker children were tired and afraid of the Indians, but young children are sturdy. They have a strength that old people may lose on life's long journey.

Peta Nokona kept Cynthia with his family. John was bartered to another tribe. Nokona's wife had a new baby, and it became Cynthia's task to care for the little one. Cynthia softened a little toward her captors when she was with the baby, whom she liked. John was traded from tribe to tribe, but six years later the Parkers were able to ransom him and take him home.

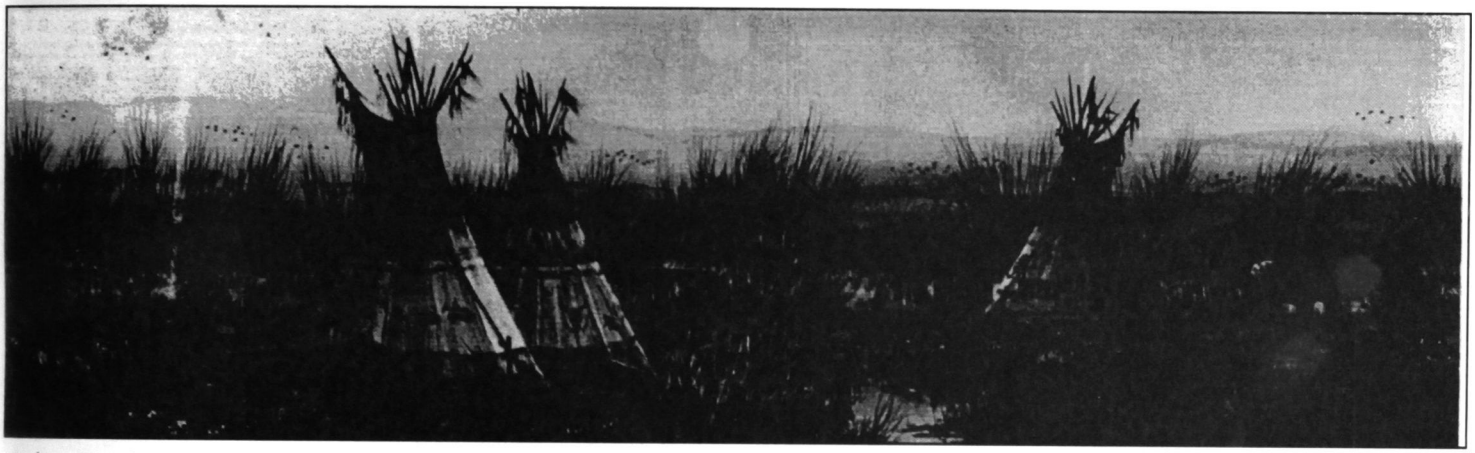
In the intervening years, Cynthia Ann stayed with the chief's family. Gradually she learned the ways and the language of the Comanches, and, to the extent that it was possible, considering she was white, she became one of them. She had much to learn. Language was a barrier but by signs she came to know that tith'ca-doh meant to eat, pues nie-hibe to drink, huth-l'su meant bird, and sie-e, feather. Tos'afit was white and tu-huft was black; u-noio was egg, and pe-eque was fish.

Nokona's mate, Going for Water, showed the white girl, renamed Naduah by the Comanches, how to cure the hides of buffalo and deer. Cynthia, or Naduah, did not like to do it, but she was a captive--a slave. Deerskins furnished the Indian's clothing, with long fringes and dyes, and paints and beads, for adornment. Comanches wore deerskin moccasins, leggings, and leather pants covered almost down to the knee with a section of deerskin. Pieces of silver, beaten flat and rounded into conch circles, were used for hair decoration, sometimes with a feather or two. Buffalo hides made robes, bedding, tent and teepee coverings, warriors' shields for battle, and a travois (two long poles pulled behind a horse, with skins attached to form a sort of big basket).

Hooks hacked from notched tree limbs were used to stretch the fresh hides. Pelts were placed on the ground and stakes driven in the soil at short distances from the hide's outer edge. Rawhide thongs were soaked until soft, and one was tied to a stake, with the other end attached to a hook caught in the fleshy hide. As the sun dried the thongs, they shrank, stretching the hide. Dried, the pelt was scraped with sharp stones and gnarled horns, to remove fat and flesh. The hide was turned over and hair was rubbed off with oval stones, not unlike a "mano" stone used to grind corn into meal. Some skins were soaked in water until the hair fell out. For bedding purposes, the hair was left on.

A knife made of flint was used to cut the finished hides into patterns and the pieces were stitched together with a needle of bone, and strings of rawhide. In later years, the Comanches got knives and tools in raids on Mexican settlements and through trading with traveling white merchants.

Palo Duro Canyon in North Texas furnished makings for bows and arrows, flint, and buffalo and deer for food and hides. Osage orange, or *bois d'arc* (named by French trappers), was prized wood for making bows. Arrow shafts were decorated to show ownership. Trappings that might carry identifying designs and touches of paint were the *hu-et* (bow), *pa'can* (arrow), and *ho-wanni* (hatchet). The favorite paints of Comanches to identify tribal influence were red, yellow, and blue.



John Tracy II *Indian Camp* watercolor 1986

The thickest buffalo hides were used for lodge coverings. The neck portions, toughest of all, were made into war shields. They coated the hides, sometimes water-soaked, with a mixture of pine pitch and sand granules, to toughen them even beyond their natural thickness. Cynthia, or Naduah, learned to make a par-fleche, a rawhide bag intended at first to hold arrows, but its usage included carrying of pemmican, dried meat, dried berries, and tallow. Sometimes squash-like food and tender roots were available. Dried meat, or jerky, was sliced into strips and hung in the sun to dry. Dried it would keep better.

Pemmican was made of dried, lean strips of buffalo meat. It was easiest to prepare the strips in late fall, when a freeze had killed off the flies and insects. After drying, the meat was pounded into a sort of powder. Fat from wild game might be added, and sometimes, wild berries.

Cooking required skill and patience. Before the Comanches got pots from white traders and from Mexican settlements, they cooked food by placing it in buffalo hides and tossing heated rocks in with the food. Open-fire cooking was done by hanging meat and wild game on green limbs over flames. The outer layer, burnt, was peeled off to get at the underlying layers of tasty meat.

Naduah in time grew away from her life as a child and came to like the life she had been forced to endure as a captive. When she reached her mid-teens, Nokona took her as one of his wives. She bore him three children, Quanah, Peycas, and Topasannah. In 1860, when Cynthia was about 24 and Topasannah was a toddler, on a day when the Comanche camp in North Texas was unprotected with the men away hunting, Texas Rangers raided the camp and returned Cynthia and her daughter to Parker Fort. Topasannah sickened and died, and within a few years, Cynthia was dead--it was said, of a broken heart because she wanted to return to the Indians. Quanah, half-white, half-Indian, took his mother's last name and became Quanah Parker, the last great chief of the Comanches. He surrendered to the U.S. Army in 1875 and lived on a reservation in Southwest Oklahoma until 1911.

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